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The U.S. really showed Korea

By John D. Lofton Jr.

WASHINGTON — Watching my country react to the premeditated, savage, brutal murder of two of our men in uniform at the hands of Communist North Korean thugs, I do not know whether to laugh or cry.

By now, the facts of what happened are well known. On Aug. 18, inside a joint United Nations-North Korean patrolled area at Panmunjon, a party of nine South Koreans, two U. S. officers and four U. S. MPs entered this region to prune a 40-foot poplar tree blocking the view of a U. N. observation post in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

At this point, a North Korean lieutenant and seven of his men approached Capt. Arthur Bonifas, 33, of Newburgh, N. Y., and Lt. Mark Barrett, 24, of Columbia, S. C. He asked them what was going on. They explained their party was there to trim the tree.

"Good," the North Korean replied, and he sat down to watch.

Then, without warning, the North Korean lieutenant leaped to his feet and demanded that the tree-trimming be halted. When the Americans refused, a North Korean guard ran across his side of the DMZ's "Bridge of No Return" and returned with a truckload of reinforcements.

What occurred next is detailed in a report from U. S. Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett Jr. to the head of the U. N. Security Council, Isao Abe of Japan:

"One North Korean officer took off his watch, wrapped it in a handkerchief and placed it in his pocket. Another of the officers rolled up his sleeves. The U. N. Command senior officer was busy with the tree-pruning detail and did not see this. Immediately thereafter, the North Korean officer approached the U. N. Command officer and, crying 'kill,' struck him, knocking him to the ground."

As Newsweek magazine reports it, as Capt. Bonifas and Lt. Barrett lay

on the ground, "their North Korean attackers picked up axes that had been dropped by the terrified tree-trimmers and methodically crushed the skulls of the Americans with the blunt sides of the blades. The rest of the allied party escaped from the brawl with lesser injuries."

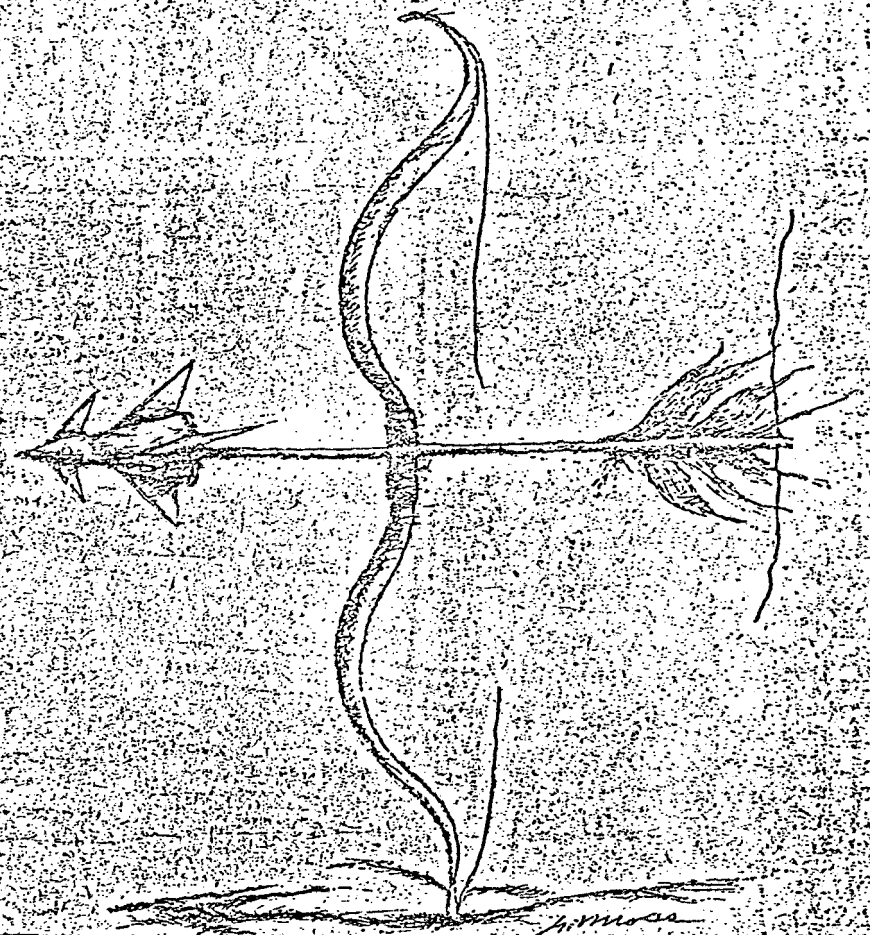
From the GOP convention in Kansas City, White House press secretary Ron Nessen quoted President Ford as saying: "Responsibility for the consequences of these murders rests with the North Korean government."

Nessen was unable to say what these consequences might be.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that what the North Koreans had done was "an act of murder" and they would be held "responsible for all consequences." Kissinger demanded "some explanations and reparation," some gestures or actions to make amends for the killings, but what he didn't say.

The State Dept. itself issued a statement viewing the murders "with gravity and concern," warning that such actions "cannot be tolerated." How would this U. S. intolerance manifest itself? Foggy Bottom didn't say.

Finally, the U. S. government



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